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by

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IN A SURVEY made by the *Woman's Home Companion* some time ago, 2000 women were asked two questions. The first one was: "Do you think mature, intelligent people of basically different religious backgrounds can have a happy marriage?" The answers of 83 per cent of the Catholics among the 2000 questioned were in the affirmative.

The second question was: "If your son or daughter wished to marry someone of basically different religious views, would you disapprove of the marriage?" In this case 61 per cent of the Catholics queried answered that they would not disapprove.

There is something radically wrong here, not necessarily with the *Woman's Home Companion*, but with the Catholics who blithely expressed convictions that are contrary to reason, experience and the teachings of their religion. Granted that there may not have been many Catholics among the 2000 who

responded to the questions. Granted that those Catholics who were asked for an opinion may have been among the weaker and less intelligent (though highly educated in a secular sort of way) classes of Catholic people. Anyone who has had any experience with pre-marriage and post-marriage problems knows that there are so-called Catholics who would answer these questions in the same bland and ignorant way. All such need to be brought face to face with the evidence that will reveal their lack of understanding of basic spiritual, moral and religious truths on which human happiness depends.

While these words are directed primarily to Catholics who as yet see nothing unfortunate or inimical to happiness in a mixed marriage (by the term "mixed marriage" we here mean any marriage of two persons with basically different religious views) it is hoped that they will also be read carefully by those who are not Catholics. The evidence against the prospective happiness of mixed marriage is not such as can be grasped only by Catholics. It is capable of forming judgments in the minds of all who do any thinking about the meaning of life and the requirements of such happiness as God has destined for His human creatures.

The first evidence we present may appeal only to Catholics, though every non-Catholic

should recognize the validity of its appeal to any authentic Catholic. The second and third kinds of evidence to be presented here should carry weight with anyone who possesses a sense of religious responsibility and who is interested in the practical problems of happiness in marriage.

This, then, is the general statement we propose to prove: There is something radically wrong with any Catholic who sees no obstacle to happiness in a mixed marriage, either for himself, for his children, or for others. Even those who are not Catholics should recognize that this is so, and should mistrust mixed marriages. The three reasons for this statement will be presented and explained in order.

1.

The Catholic who unreservedly approves, either in general or in a particular case, of mixed marriage, shows a lack of the complete Catholic "sense" and submission that is not only a part of every genuine Catholic character, but recognized as necessary to his happiness.

It is incredible that there should be many Catholics who do not know that the Church to which they profess allegiance has forbidden her children to marry persons who are not of their religion. Canon 1060 of the laws of

the Catholic Church states: "The Church most solemnly and everywhere forbids marriage between a Catholic and a person enrolled in an heretical or schismatic sect. If there is danger of perversion for the Catholic party and the offspring, such marriage is forbidden also by the divine law." The prohibition goes even farther in respect to marriage between a Catholic and one who has never been baptized, stating that "such marriages are null and void." (Canon 1070)

For the moment it is not necessary to go into the cogent reasons that lie behind these very strict laws. Nor need we pause to comment at length on the fact that the Church does grant dispensations from them, since the dispensations are granted only for definite and serious reasons, and even then with reluctance and sorrow. The important point here is the fact that every intelligent Catholic is convinced that his happiness is bound up with his submission to the authority of the Catholic Church. If he knows why he is a Catholic at all, he knows that it is because the Catholic Church represents the voice of Christ directing him infallibly toward salvation and happiness.

Therefore the real Catholic "senses" instinctively that there are grave objections to mixed marriage since the Church has made

such severe laws concerning it; and he submits conscientiously to the wisdom of those laws even though he may not have had ample time to study their centuries of background and their deeply religious and spiritual foundations. If he feels that he, or someone close to him, has one of the serious reasons for seeking a dispensation from the law, he recognizes that he is asking for a dangerous favor, realizes that he is not doing the best thing for his happiness, and later on blames no one but himself if unhappiness or evil consequences follow upon his action. But in no case does he brush aside the legislation of the Church, either as something to be ignored, or to be resented, or to be considered meaningless, by saying, "I see no objection and no obstacle to happiness in a mixed marriage."

Non-Catholics may and often do resent the fact that the Catholic Church has legislated strongly against mixed marriages. They may have little grasp of the reasons and history behind such legislation, and may have heard many anti-Catholic denunciations of the anti-mixed marriage laws of the Church. But the logic of this syllogism they must perceive: A Catholic is one who believes that the Catholic Church has both the authority and the guidance of Christ to govern him in matters of faith and morals, and that his happiness depends on submission and loyalty to her. In

the important spiritual and moral matter of marriage the Church tells her members that they should not marry persons who are not of their faith. Therefore any person who disregards the law, or speaks as if there is nothing to be said against mixed marriage, neither believes nor speaks like a genuine Catholic.

2.

The Catholic who unreservedly approves either in general or in a particular case, of mixed marriage, manifests a tragic lack of understanding of the supreme destiny for which God created and redeemed all men (which is perfect happiness), and of the means by which it is made secure.

The submission of a genuine Catholic to the laws laid down by the Catholic Church against mixed marriage is not a blind or unintelligent submission. It arises from principles so clear and from experience so overwhelming that, even if there were no explicit law in the matter, he would find his conscience bound by some such strict rules.

For anyone, Catholic or not, to say that he sees no obstacle to happiness in a mixed marriage, is to reveal a very mistaken notion about happiness. To explain this statement one need only present what an informed Catholic believes about happiness and the means

to attain it, and then show why and how a mixed marriage presents obstacles to such happiness.

One who has fully accepted the Catholic philosophy of life believes that perfect happiness can be found by him only in heaven. He believes that he was created to win that happiness; that it is the one great goal that must be kept before him throughout life. He believes that the Son of God became man in order to redeem him from the unhappiness that was due to him as a result of sin, and to teach him how, with the help of the grace Christ merited for him, he is to win heaven for himself. He believes that he must observe the commandments laid down by Christ, and subject all earthly or material considerations to the question of whether they will interfere with his attainment of heaven.

Such a Catholic believes that the only obstacle to his attaining heaven is deliberate serious sin, and that the stakes are so high that he must avoid even the danger of sin. Also, he believes that he is bound in conscience to transmit to any children for whose life he may be responsible his own deep conviction of the importance of working for heaven, and to use every means of setting his children upon the road that leads to it. Finally, he is convinced that the highest degree of relative

happiness on earth will always be dependent on an individual's concern with saving his soul and the souls of those dependent on him, and his fidelity to the commandments God has laid down as means to that end.

Now it is obvious that a Catholic, or any other conscientious religious person, who sees nothing unfortunate about a mixed marriage, has a different idea of happiness than that which is taken for granted by every true Catholic. He may consider happiness in marriage dependent on satisfactory sex relations, or on mutual sharing of material comforts and possessions, or on compromise concerning one's own desires or even principles. In so doing he is not touching on the real issue of happiness at all, and certainly is not talking about the happiness that is of first importance to every Catholic and even every Christian.

A mixed marriage is an obstacle to the real happiness a Christian is determined to win for two reasons. First, it presents a danger of sin, the specific danger that one partner to the marriage will be moved to violate his conscience for the sake of a kind of peace in marriage. This looks like a very vague danger to many a young Catholic who is deeply in love, and who has been repeatedly assured by the non-Catholic spouse-to-be that "difference of religion will never be permitted

to interfere with our happiness." Yet after the marriage many a Catholic has found that the only way in which differences of religion can be kept from interfering with the non-Catholic's idea of happiness is by the Catholic's submission to practices that he knows to be seriously wrong and therefore a renunciation of the happiness of heaven.

The most common example of how this happens is in the matter of contraception, though there are many others. The non-Catholic comes to think, after some years of marriage, that contraception is a good thing, even a necessary thing, despite all promises before marriage that he would not demand it of his partner. Now he does demand it. The Catholic partner has two choices, either to refuse and resist cooperation in the sin, which will result in very definite tension and temporal unhappiness; or to submit and surrender to the sin, which means turning his back on heaven and his face toward hell. The same situation can arise in a wide variety of other ways.

The second obstacle to happiness presented by a mixed marriage arises from the realization of the genuine Catholic that he is bound to transmit to his children his own convictions about the supreme importance of winning heaven and about the necessary means through

which it is to be won. This is not a task that can very often be carried out by one parent alone, especially when the other parent either has no conviction about the importance of working for heaven, or, worse still, believes in a different set of moral and religious principles as the means to attain it. The very fact that one parent must try to instruct and train children in a religious system, and at the same time explain to them why their other parent does not consider it important or necessary, is a great obtacle to establishing convictions in their minds.

Experience presents overwhelming proof that this difficulty far too often brings about the result that the children of a mixed marriage either lose the faith, or hold it in a very weak and unstable way. Those who have made practical studies on this matter can give awesome figures on the huge numbers of children born of mixed marriages who are eventually lost to the faith; and those who have to deal with the problems of souls testify to the equally large numbers who never become strong enough to face up to the temptations and tests that every adult Catholic must encounter. There are exceptions, it must be admitted, but for any Catholic to count on his children being an exception to the general rule that parents of mixed religions can ordinarily bequeath only a weak faith, or no faith at all,

to their children, is a fearful thing when the stakes are nothing less than everlasting happiness in heaven.

The genuine Catholic, therefore, will always say that he sees grave danger of unhappiness in a mixed marriage. It is the unhappiness of very probably one day seeing his children lost to the faith he holds necessary for salvation and happiness. It is also the unhappiness of one day being drawn into serious sin himself, for the sake of temporary peace in his home.

3.

The Catholic who unreservedly approves of mixed marriage manifests a childish lack of understanding of the psychological elements that enter into the kind of happiness that God intends for married life even here on earth.

Happiness in married life, even in the relative sense in which the word must always be used outside of heaven, depends over the years on one thing, and that is the complete union of husband and wife, or, to put it another way, the sharing of all that they have in common. It is not sufficient for real married happiness, that husband and wife be united in body through sharing the privileges of marriage, nor that they be united in their recreations, nor that they be united in the

physical procreation of children. They need to be united in mind, in beliefs, in soul, in spiritual aspirations and practices. Without this last kind of union the others will in time become shallow and unsatisfying, like bonds that can easily be snapped, as they so often are by divorce.

It is difficult to convince a person who is in love, or who looks upon any marriage, even a more or less risky one, as better than no marriage, of the importance of the full sharing of spiritual beliefs, practices and aspirations for a happy marriage. It is so easy for such a one to think, in the first flush of love, that happiness will flow in abundant measure from physical union, recreational companionship and mutual self-projection in the form of children. With this naive and childlike confidence, many enter a mixed marriage, only to realize a few years later that the most important part of their nature is their soul, and that, if two people are not united in soul, no other comradeship in marriage can save them from heartache and loneliness.

Practically every case in which a Catholic protests that this is not so in his mixed marriage is an example of diminishing spiritual values, sometimes even of adopted indifferentism and religious compromise. In the world today, with all its material comforts, distrac-

tions, thought-impeding activities and opportunities of escapism, it is possible for Catholics to forget about their souls, to kill their aspirations for heaven and to fill their lives with worldly activities, thinking half-consciously and only now and then that somehow everything will turn out all right for their souls in the end.

Such persons will often boast that their mixed marriage is a wonderfully happy one, a complete answer to all the warnings they have heard that mixed marriages cannot be thoroughly successful. They have paid a terrible price for their convictions, a price that will continue to be paid by their children after they are gone. If the result is happiness, it may be the temporary kind of which Our Lord spoke to the Pharisees: "Amen, I say to you, you have your reward." He meant, of course, that there would be no reward for them in heaven.

A real Catholic is one who loves to go to Mass and receive Communion, who believes absolutely in the necessity of prayer, who takes delight in helping to spread the faith through missionary activity and contributions, who constantly measures the value of all actions by their conformity to the moral law and God's will. Psychologically it is incredible that any such Catholic should think for

a moment that he could be really happy in the intimate and life-long union of marriage with a person who has no interest in any of these things, or even, in many cases, a prejudice against them. No such Catholic would ever say, "I see no obstacle to happiness in a mixed marriage."

4.

From all these considerations every marriageable Catholic should draw a certain number of definite practical conclusions. These conclusions are just as important for non-Catholics who have definite religious and spiritual convictions. The Catholic will find them taking shape in his mind somewhat as follows:

1. Since a mixed marriage is forbidden to me by the Church, since such a marriage would be a danger to my soul and to the souls of children whom I might bring into the world, since such a marriage would be lacking in that union of souls that is far more necessary to happiness than union of bodies, I am resolved that, if I marry, I shall marry someone who shares my religious faith completely.

2. If I am attracted to one who is not of my faith, and start keeping company with such a one, I shall speak of my resolve and of the reasons for it very early in our friendship. Then I shall make the continuation of

our friendship and company-keeping dependent on whether the friend is seriously interested in learning about my religion and ultimately sharing it with me. All this will be done before I join in any talk of future marriage or commit myself to it in any way.

3. If I ever think that I have one of the serious reasons for entering a mixed marriage for which the Church will grant a dispensation, I shall still realize that to act on it will be dangerous to my soul and the souls of my children, and that such a marriage will demand sacrifices of me, and will bring up problems, and will make for conflicts, that should not be a part of married life. I shall not complain or grow bitter when these things actually come to pass. I shall suffer any temporal unhappiness rather than compromise my faith, which is the source of my only true happiness. I shall remember that by entering a mixed marriage I assume the obligation of being, not an ordinary Catholic, but an heroic Catholic.

The following pages present some of the more common problems connected with mixed marriages.

Non-Catholic Wife

Problem: I married a non-Catholic girl, in the hope that I would be able to bring her around to accept the Catholic faith soon after we were married. I did not press her to consider the matter seriously before marriage, just because I felt so certain that she would do so of her own accord later on. However, we are now married some ten years and she seems farther away from becoming a Catholic than ever. There seems to be a growing gap between us, and it makes me miserably unhappy. What am I to do?

Solution: Your case is one that primarily provides an occasion for warning others against the mistake you made. You did make a mistake, and a big one, and you should now take the consequences like a man. Misplaced and unfounded hope that all will turn out well, even though experience and tradition raise grave doubts about it, seems to be the outstanding mistake made by young people in love. If you had followed the advice of wise counsellors before marriage, you would not have been satisfied with a vague hope that your wife would some day become a Catholic, but would have seen it to that you could start out your married life with agreement and unity in so important a thing as religion. Without that you would not have entered upon

a lifelong adventure. Now that your youthful hope seems to be beyond realization, and that you are experiencing the loneliness and heartache of difference in fundamental beliefs, you can only accept the fruit of your folly and offer it up as a price of atonement and a constant petition for peace in your home.

However, hope need never be completely abandoned in cases like yours, if you are willing to do all you can to change the situation. If you are really willing to do all you can, what you must do can be summed up in a few words: you must determine to become and live as a saint. No half-measures in the practice of your faith will do. No neglect of your own daily prayers, no carelessness and sloth about getting to the sacraments frequently, no compromising with your own faults, can be tolerated if you are truly sincere about wanting to make your home fully Catholic. Example and prayer have teamed up to work miracles before; they can do it again. But half-heartedness in your own faith, habits of anger, impatience, intemperance, cursing, etc., on your part will all stand before your wife as a contradiction of any avowals you make of the value of being a Catholic. If your faith cannot make you a saint, as it is intended to do, you have only yourself to blame if it continues to have little appeal for your non-Catholic wife.

Anti-Catholic Husband

Problem: My husband, who is not a Catholic, ridicules me for any external practice of religion, such as prayers before and after meals, going to Mass and confession, wearing medals, etc. Is it wrong for me to hide my religious practices from him in order to prevent such ridicule? Would I be permitted to stay away from Mass on Sunday for that reason?

Solution: There are two different principles involved in your question and it is understandable that your mind should be somewhat confused. On the one hand, there is the principle that we should not needlessly invite or occasion ridicule of religion; but on the other hand, there is the principle that we must fulfill the important duties that we owe to God at the cost of sacrifice and often even in the face of ridicule.

For yourself, you will sufficiently apply the first of these two principles, if you merely guard against giving unnecessary occasions for your husband's ridicule of religion. You should not ostentatiously parade your religious practices before him; you should not intensify his ridicule by anger and impatient argument against it; and you must remember that the most cogent arguments against ridicule of re-

ligion are the practices of virtue that religion teaches you: forbearance, forgiveness, patience, humility, self-sacrifice, kindness. It is no good to argue against ridicule if your life does not make you more and more worthy of admiration and love.

The second principle takes precedence over the first in regard to the important duties of religion. You certainly should not give up Mass and the sacraments merely because of ridicule, though you may use any prudent means to keep your attendance away from your husband's attention. Similarly with prayer; you must pray even more than an ordinary wife because of your mixed marriage and its problem, though you need not and should not exasperate your husband by frequent and showy displays. But if you permit mere ridicule to hinder the fulfilment of the serious tasks of your religion, you will be unworthy of the ridiculed Christ, you will soon compromise your conscience in other ways, and you will lose your religion.

Insincere Marriage Promises

Complaint: My wife doesn't want to keep the promise she made when we were married —that she would bring up all our children in the Catholic faith. She is a non-Catholic and she is going back on her word. What can I do to hand down my faith to the children when their mother has turned out to be what she is?

Solution: The Catholic man who deliberately enters into marriage with a non-Catholic thereby asks for trouble and thereafter usually gets it in abundant measure. He has only himself to blame. He permitted an infatuation to blind him to the fact that, even with the sincerest good will in the world and the strictest sense of fidelity to promises, a non-Catholic mother cannot impart a thorough-going Catholic education to her children. She has none of the essential equipment for the task. But when elementary good will and fidelity to promises are lacking in the wife, the Catholic husband and father is almost in the position of a man standing helpless on the high bank of a river and watching someone he loves being swept by the irresistible current of the river toward a roaring falls.

If he comes to his senses after such a marriage (he was out of his senses when he

entered it) the Catholic husband and father will find peace of conscience only by heroic efforts. He will have to build up his own faith and religious practice to a point where it will become an overwhelming example to the children. He should become almost a daily communicant; he must so thoroughly inform himself on matters of his faith that even in the short periods in which he is able to influence the children he will be able to impress upon their minds the logic and certainty of his religion; he must now combine infinite patience in bearing the contradictions of his home life with unlimited zeal to make his wife see where she is doing wrong. The way is not easy. The majority of such victims of mixed marriage cannot take it, their children are lost to the faith, and their own faith grows weaker through the years. Only by true heroism can the mistake originally made be rectified and spiritual happiness salvaged for all.

Should a Husband Be Urged to Become a Catholic?

Problem: My marriage is a mixed marriage, but my husband is very much interested in my faith. He promised to join soon. He would right away if I *asked* him. Is that what I should do, or should I wait till he does it on his own?

Solution: There are two types of circumstances possible here. If, on the one hand, your husband is interested in your faith to the point where he recognizes its truth and necessity for all, then you should not hesitate to encourage him to take the necessary steps to become a Catholic. It is a matter of common experience that even after persons are convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith, they need encouragement and support from those they love to make their submission. A born Catholic can never fully realize how many things, seemingly unimportant, can act as barriers to this most important step, from a mere tendency to procrastinate to a very real fear of the hurt it may give to others who do not understand. A wife can surely lessen the period of procrastination, and probably minimize largely the fear of consequences by an act of gentle suggestion and prodding now and then. This, of course, should never take

the form of nagging, nor of importunate pleading.

If however, your husband is interested in your faith solely because you are interested, and not because he knows anything about it, then your suggestions should be less direct and forthright, but even in that case you should even try to put him in the way of better knowledge of your religion, e.g., by leaving books and pamphlets around the house, or by suggesting now and then that he talk to a priest, or take instructions. Note especially that if a person as yet does not have any grasp of the truth of the Catholic faith, we should not ask him to become a Catholic for our sake, but we should ask him to look into the claims of the Church for our sake. The love of someone is not a good motive for becoming a Catholic; but it is an excellent motive for studying the Catholic religion. Once it is understood, most people want to belong to the Catholic religion for its own sake.

In general then, it can be concluded that it is not the right attitude to determine never to ask anyone to become a Catholic or to study the Catholic religion, if we are in a position to do so easily. The greatest charity in the world is to help someone find the truth.

Catholic Girl's Quandary

Problem: "I am engaged to be married. My boy friend is not a Catholic, but he consented to go with me to my pastor to make arrangements for our wedding. When he found out from the priest that he would have to promise that all our children would be brought up as Catholics, he told me that he would never sincerely make such a promise. Now he wants me to marry him before a justice of the peace. I love him dearly and cannot give him up. Isn't there something I can do about this?

Solution: What should be done to meet a situation of this kind should have been done long before the impasse arose, long before any promises of marriage were given. The very fact that you don't know what to do indicates quite clearly that you entered upon company-keeping and permitted yourself to be propelled towards marriage without any clear, Catholic sense of proportionate values. Now the fact that you are in love makes you want to find some way out of the duty you owe to God.

For either of two reasons a courageous and well-informed Catholic girl would tell the boy in your case that she could not marry him. The first reason is that he insists that she abandon a principle that must be rooted in

the conscience of every Catholic girl, viz., that she must transmit her faith to her children. The second reason is that he wants her to enter what would be an invalid marriage for her. To give in to a fiance on either of these points is fatal to the soul of a Catholic.

A truly Catholic girl has such dangers as these in mind from the outset of her friendship with any man. She does not easily enter into company-keeping with a non-Catholic because of them. If she does start going with a non-Catholic, having a good reason for so doing that is stronger than the advice of the Church, she lets him know from the outset how firm is her own faith and how impossible for her is any compromise of its principles. She tries to transmit some of her convictions, and their logical foundations, to her boy friend. If she finds him indifferent to all religion, or opposed to her religion, she becomes aware at once that marriage to him would be most unhappy.

The great tragedies of life begin with statements like yours. What you are really saying is this: "I am in love with a man. I must abandon God to possess him. Can't you suggest something that will let me have this man anyway?"

Is Mixed Company-Keeping a Mortal Sin?

Problem: I am a Catholic nineteen years old and have a non-Catholic boy friend whom I like very much. Recently my father told me that I must give this boy up because it is a mortal sin for a Catholic to keep steady company with a non-Catholic. I am sure that this cannot be true because if it is there are surely hundreds of Catholics committing this mortal sin. My father reads THE LIGUORIAN and I beg you to write the truth about this question so that he will understand.

Solution: Your father is considerably nearer the truth than the many young Catholics who are endangering their happiness and their souls by mixed company-keeping, even though there are some distinctions to be made in the matter.

Your father no doubt bases his statements on a principle that is clearly set down in the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, according to which Catholics are seriously forbidden to enter into mixed marriages. The law goes on to state that this prohibition arises from the divine law whenever there is danger of loss or lessening of the faith of the Catholic, whenever there is danger that the children of such a marriage will be deprived of a full Catholic

upbringing, and whenever there is danger of scandal or weakening of the faith of others. (Experience proves that in most mixed marriages some of these dangers are to be found.) But even apart from these dangers which one may not deliberately encounter without breaking the divine law, mixed marriages are forbidden to Catholics by the universal ecclesiastical law.

Since mixed marriage itself is thus forbidden, the conclusion can surely be drawn that, since company-keeping is only lawful when it may be a preparation for a good marriage, mixed company-keeping is unlawful for Catholics. There may be exceptions to this general rule, but the exceptions can be based only on definite reasons for which the Church grants dispensations for Catholics to marry non-Catholics. Some of the exceptions would be based on the following circumstances: 1) If a Catholic lives in an area in which there are very few Catholics, so that there is little chance of marriage except with a non-Catholic. 2) If a Catholic is well past the ordinary years in which marriage is thought about, and thus has greatly lessened chances of finding a partner for marriage. 3) If a Catholic starts going with a non-Catholic who almost at once shows a sincere interest in the Catholic faith and thus gives solid hope that he (or she) will become a Catholic, preferably before marriage

or even engagement. In any case the company-keeping is forbidden if there is obvious danger to the faith or morals or future children of the Catholic.

As a girl of nineteen, living in a city with a large Catholic population, you cannot defend your mixed company-keeping on either of the first two counts. If you are on the sure way to making your boy-friend a Catholic, you need only convince your father of that and all will be well.

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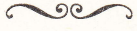

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